

G. Qualitative Research and the Beltline's Decision Making Tools

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Qualitative Research

- Interviews
(Structured and Unstructured)
- Surveys
- Participation
- Ethnography
- Observation

Denzin and Lincoln, *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (2005)

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Advantages/Drawbacks to Qualitative Research

- Provides data when quantitative measures aren't available
- Offers rich detail and context that is needed for valid conclusions and action
- Allows informants to actively participate in research design and analysis
- Highly subject to interpretation and researcher bias/error
- Time/resource consuming and often impractical to execute
- Often not challenged by quantitative researchers as invalid and ungeneralizable

Overarching Research Questions

- For whom are we building the Beltline?
 - Workers, Residents (homeowners/renters), Students, Tourists, Shoppers, Children, Elderly, etc.
 - *How do they function now? Itineraries?*
 - *How might they use the Beltline?*
 - *What lies between their current and future transportation needs?*
 - *What obstacles to access exist? Which ones might exist in the future?*
 - *What impacts will the planning and completion of the Beltline have on various groups?*

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Community Involvement Civic Engagement

- Participant - Observation Research
 - *Researchers attend and participate in community meetings, visioning exercises, local events and daily life. They record comments, events, themes from meetings and other spaces.*
- Action Research
 - *Encompasses many forms of qualitative research and allows interviewees/participants to shape the direction of the research. Research protocols are created jointly by neighborhood residents and professional research staff.*
- Recommendation -- Consider systematic participant-observation of Beltline related planning events

Environmental Justice and Equity Considerations

- Interviews
 - *Researchers would conduct interviews with local advocates or neighborhoods currently or potentially impacted by environmental justice or equity issues.*
- Observation
 - *Researchers could employ participant-observation technique or dispatch residents to offer their own "observations" through text or visual media.*
- Recommendation – A mix of structured interviews with key stakeholders and advocates and participant-led observation would be appropriate.

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Metrics of “Social Capital”

- Surveys
 - Researchers explore perceptions of increasing/decreasing neighborhood capacity by administering paper or in-person surveys.
- Evaluations of Institutional Effectiveness
 - Researchers conduct interviews and/or content analyses to understand what role neighborhood or city level organizations/structures are contributing to the planning process.
- Recommendation – Surveys may be useful but are often difficult to conduct and would not offer much on “social capital”. Evaluations of individual institutions would be impractical for planning purposes as it might impede the larger process.

Displacement

- Ethnography
 - *Researchers live in (or visit often) target neighborhoods to answer research questions. They take fieldnotes and conduct semi-structured interviews over the course of a defined research period.*
- Recommendation -- A full scale and traditional ethnography is impractical for Beltline planning purposes but useful for finding hidden populations. An adapted form—network ethnography—might be useful to consider.

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Concluding Recommendations

- Qualitative research for Beltline planning will:
 - Complement quantitative/spatial/market analysis
 - Accurately represent lived experiences and needs of Atlanta residents
 - Provide basis of action and planning
- Research Mode
 - Mixed--Respondent-Driven Sampling and Participant Observation
 - Create demographic profile of subareas
 - Employ a network ethnography method to find and interview hidden populations in each area
 - Join the results of respondent-driven sampling with observations of results of participant-observation of planning events and neighborhood responses to outreach to create evolving perspective of process and neighborhood needs
 - Add findings and analysis to quantitative/spatial/market analysis of neighborhoods